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Harrier-like hunting behaviour by a Crane Hawk *Geranospiza caerulescens*

by Fabio Olmos

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The Crane Hawk *Geranospiza caerulescens* is widely distributed in a number of subspecies from Mexico to Argentina, living in various habitats, from rain forest to mangroves, but generally near water (Brown & Amadon 1968: 376–378). Recent literature (Brown & Amadon 1968: 378, Sick 1985: 214) emphasizes that this hawk explores cavities and crevices in bark, trunks and epiphytes with its feet and bill for food. The anatomical structure of the hind limbs is specially adapted for this (Burton 1978).

On 6 September 1988, at c. 08.00 hrs I observed a Crane Hawk foraging along a dry mud strip with scattered herbs alongside the Transantaneira Highway (c. 56°59'W, 17°16'S), Mato Grosso, Brazil. For a general description of the area see Schaller & Crawshaw (1982).

When first seen, the hawk was hanging motionless about c. 3 m above the ground, looking directly downwards, facing into the strong prevailing wind. Suddenly the hawk dropped with half folded wings, spiralling down through 360° before landing and grasping a small item (probably an insect) with its left foot, which it picked at with its bill and swallowed. After looking around for a few moments the hawk walked 2 steps and jumped, opening its wings and gaining height by facing the wind, without flapping its wings. At a height of 2–3 m the hawk managed to progress forward by only slightly adjusting its wings, progressing slowly for a few metres before dropping again.

This process was repeated 6 times along a 30 m stretch. In 5 instances small items (probably insects or small frogs) were caught; in one the hawk landed on a pile of dry skin and hairs left from a mammal carcass and examined it briefly with the bill. At this point the hawk detected me and flew away with strong wing beats.

Sutton (1954) writing about the northern form *G. c. nigra* (once considered a full species) reported seeing this hawk hunting on the wing over open ground like a harrier. This hunting method appears not to have been

reported since, most of the recent works on the feeding behaviour of the species dealing with the burrow and crevices exploring habit. My observations agree with Sutton and show that over the open fields of the Pantanal this species may hunt this way. In addition, I have seen this species visiting a carcass (perhaps looking for insects), feeding behaviour which apparently has not been reported since Carriker (1910).

Although these foraging strategies appear to be rarer than crevice exploring, in some habitats they may be just as important for the species, specially in open areas like the Pantanal. It is interesting to remember that individual specializations in hunting techniques seem to occur frequently among the Falconiformes, variations which probably have adaptive value, allowing exploitation of resources which are rarely or never used, thus avoiding inter-specific competition.

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BOOKS RECEIVED

Ridgely, R. S. & Tudor, G. 1989. *The Birds of South America. The oscine passerines*. Pp. 516. 31 colour plates. Over 700 distribution maps. Oxford University Press. Hard covers. £45.00. 250 × 175 mm.

This is the first of a projected 4 volume field handbook, covering over 700 species, all the true songbirds of South America's rich avifauna, with a wealth of detail on specific and differential identification, derived from personal examination of over 95% of the species and subspecies known, together with their habitats, behaviour and range. Subspecies are mentioned under identification for purposes of distinguishing races in the field if possible. Introductory sections explain the plan of the book, describe the habitats and discuss the biogeography, migration (very briefly, so little in general is known) and conservation (with an annotated list of 46 songbirds considered to be at risk). The plates are of Guy Tudor's usual high standard and have been "meticulously researched for soft part colours and perching attitudes"; the size of the volume ensures that detail is readily seen. The plates are organised for assembling various genera and subgenera groups, and the sequence used in the book, from families down to species is "not necessarily an accurate reflection of present taxonomic thinking", harmlessly it is considered, since systematics is at present in such a state of flux. Opposite each plate the text discusses salient differential characteristics. There is a long, useful bibliography.